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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the work of a teacher at the Heartwood Dance Center, a school of dance and related arts in rural Calhoun County, West Virginia. The teacher also conducts freelance workshops in local schools of the region, where people are isolated and incomes are generally low. The extent to which children are talented is partially dependent on the environment in which they are raised. Categorizing children as being talented or untalented discourages them from exploring and challenging themselves. On the other hand, observing all children equally while creating a noncompetitive, nurturing environment helps bring them into contact with their artistic identities. Workshops at the Heartwood Dance Center include activities in music, dance, pantomime, and creative dramatics with masks and visual arts. Initial dance warmups begin with pedestrian and sports movements familiar to the children. Music is introduced and students are soon ready to explore larger movements with musical accompaniment. The warmup and dance are followed by singing songs, some of which are made up by the children or teacher. Creative dramatics with masks often liberate children from their inhibitions. Also included in this workshop are theatre games and voice exercises. Photographs and magazine articles are used for discussion and to exercise young imaginations. A picture of a hot-air balloon, for example, might launch an imaginary trip for a group of youngsters. Afterward, the children are encouraged to draw and color what they saw on their "voyage." (TES)

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Bringing Dance to Rural Students

by Jude Binder

I live and teach in West Virginia. Calhoun County, where I live and do most of my work is very rural and isolated. The population is about 8,500, and per capita income is less than 7,000, among the lowest in the state's 55 counties.

I chose to come here because I wanted to put myself in a place where I could make a difference. My experience of the past fourteen years, which has been as educational for me as for my students, fills me with enthusiasm for the work ahead.

I do most of my work at Heartwood Dance Center, a school of dance and related arts where I live and teach. I teach freelance workshops in the public schools here in Calhoun and surrounding counties, and over the years I have developed certain methods of presenting the creative arts in public school settings. During this time I have come to conclusions about talent and the place of the arts in general education which I would like to share with teachers who work in situations similar to mine in rural West Virginia. Although this article is brief, I hope readers of Classroom Clips where I'm coming from find it useful.

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I believe that every child has creative talent. The extent to which children are talented however, depends upon their genetic heritage; the presence of a creative, stimulating environment; and exposure to adults who are creative and encouraging. A teacher moves in with tools and time to pay attention, as well as faith in children, encouraging them to participate in activities that foster creation and expression.

Because every human being is gifted by nature, each developing child is a developing artist. Unfortunately, the adult world compartmentalizes children very early. Artists are identified and singled out, often to their detriment. As they become self-conscious in their work, child artists begin to work for praise and recognition, losing the direct line they once had to their artistic selves.They lose the delicious self-fulfillment that comes from total immersion in artistic creation.

On the other hand, because the vast majority of children are not categorized as artistically talented their creative gifts go unrecognized and unnurtured. So much attention is paid to the "artist" in the classroom (the child with a certain kind of easily recognizable talent) that the others are made to feel inferior, and they lose their courage to explore and challenge themselves.

As I see it, my job as a teacher is to observe all children equally, to look for the opening into each creative self. What is it that grabs their attention? What are the things that truly interest them?

Once I have answered these questions, I can plan activities that work childrens' imaginatioans and stimulate them to "make" things--pictures, sculptures, stories, plays, dances, songs, and games.

In an environment that is noncompetitive and nurturing, where the focus is on process, not product, children come in contact with their individual artistic identities.

What I Do

My workshops with children include activities in music (singing and rhythmic exercises), dance, pantomime, and creative dramatics with masks, and visual arts. I usually start with a dance warmup based on pedestrian and sports movements that are already familiar to children. It begins with reaching with the arms in all directions, breast strokes, free style swimming strokes, underhand tosses and swinging an imaginary baseball bat from side to side.

I teach them the sequence of movements carefully and then turn on music that the children can immediately identify as their own. Young children will respond to any music that

is loud enough and lively, while youngsters eighth years and up prefer rock and roll and love to move to it.

After this opening warmup, students are flushed, excited, and ready for more. If there is space available, they can explore locomotive movement to musical accompaniment-walking, skipping, sliding, galloping, running, and leaping. Performed to music, these common actions take on a new character for the children. If space is not available, the opening warmup can lead directly into the other workshop activities.

I follow the warmup and dance work with singing. There are countless, wonderful sing-and-do songs, fingerplays and novelty songs that delight children. Artists like Ella Jenkins, Tom Glazer, and Pete Seeger have recorded a wealth of material for children. I also encourage the students to make up their own songs and jingles. These can be set to already existing tunes or original melodies.

Don't be afraid to make up songs of your own - it's easy to do. If you happen upon a rhyme that's catchy, repeat it three or four times, attach a different line to the end, and set it to a tune. Songs can come out of the experience of the class itself. Finger snapping, hand clapping and thigh slapping can be the accompaniment. (Also clucking, hissing, whistling, etc.)

Next we turn to creative dramatics with masks. Masks offer a kind of safety that often liberates performers from inhibitions. In the process, the viewers get a new experience they witness a transformation of someone they know: it's a good tug at the imagination! Masks made from paper are just as effective as more sophisticated masks.

Also included in this part of the workshop are theatre games and voice exercises such as recitations of tongue twisters and nonsense rhymes.

Over the years I have collected a huge assortment of photographs and magazine articles on a wide variety of subjects, which I use in my workshops to set a theme for the day's activities. For example, the theme for one workshop for primary students is transportation. I make a display of all the pictures I have showing as many modes of travel as possible.

I invite the children to sit with me and talk about the pictures and pick out the ones that they like the best. There is one of a hot air balloon that everyone likes. We decide to take a trip in one. A circle is drawn on the floor, creating our basket, and we all get in. The imaginary balloon is over our heads and we decide to decorate it with imaginary paints and brushes. Stars, polka dots, suns and hearts are painted on, using every color of the rainbow, and

we tie ribbons and banners of all kinds (they can be anything we want since they exist only in our imaginations) to the ropes that attach our basket to the balloon.

After all decorative ideas are exhausted, it's time to cut the ropes that hold the basket to the ground. Excitement builds as everyone saws away at the invisible ropes with their invisible knives and at the cry "We're up!" everyone cheers! We stand at the edge of our circle, holding onto our ropes and swaying in the wind, surveying all that lies beneath us. We talk about where we want to go and what we brought for lunch. When it's time to end the trip, we're happy that we all brought our parachutes. Once again we stand on the edge of our basket, and on the count of "3," we jump.

On landing, crayons, magic markers and paper are brought out and drawings are make of the beautiful balloon. The stars, polka dots, ribbons, and banners are a taking-off point for wonderful pictures. Following the drawings, we sing transportation songs, of which there are countless numbers, for example, "Little Red Caboose", "Let's All Go Sailing" and of course "Row Your Boat."

Throughout the course of the workshop, I try to remain open to ideas that come spontaneously from the children, allowing them free reign whenever possible. The general

feeling is exuberant.

My Favorite Resources

There are many materials available to teacher who are interested in including the creative arts in their curriculum. Some that I have found particularly useful are:

1. Theatre Games for the Classroom by Viola Spolin
   Northwestern University Press
   Evanston, Illinois 60201

2. Complete Book of Paper Mask Making by Michael Grater
   Dover Publications
   31 East 2nd Street Mineola, N.Y. 11051

3. Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain and
   Drawing on the Artist Within by Betty Edwards
   Simon & Schuster, Inc.
   Simon & Schuster Building, Rockefeller Center
   1230 Avenue of the Americas New York, NY 10020

4. Let's Sing FingerPlays Tom Glazer
   CMS Records, Inc. 14 Warren St. New York, NY 10007

5. Music for Children Carl Orff and Gunild Keetman

Angel Records Electric & Musical Industries LTD. New York NY

6. Recordings by Ella Jenkins, available on Folkways Records